

A STUDY OF *IN MEMORIAM*

Through the Problem of Science
and Poetry

KAZUKO TAMAMUSHI

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INTRODUCTION

It is only a small part of the whole cosmos of a poem that one is able to explore. In my study, I sometimes find myself in the presence of a vast field which always remains inexplicable to me. It is this mystery, however, that excites me to go on in my exploration.

Tennyson, as we know, was born in the nineteenth century, in the calm Christian atmosphere of the rectory at Somersby, while the outer world was busy with the progress of modern science. In such double surroundings the poet suffered from his serious scepticism—the conflict between science and religion, mechanical nature and human values. *In Memoriam*, which began as a personal lament on his beloved friend

Arthur Hallam, reveals his suffering from his "double awareness".¹ But, singing the song of grief and doubt, the poet gradually passes through the darkness and at last triumphs in the glory of regained faith. Where was the solution to be found? This is the question that occurs to anyone who takes interest in the way of his soul's progress.

It is said by many critics that Tennyson lacks depth of thought or that he is completely an optimist. It is very true that anyone who seeks for a reasonable solution of the problem in this poem is disappointed. Indeed, Tennyson could not attain the reconciliation by his own power; the reconciling power was outside the poet himself, and it was given to him while he was unaware. But does it mean the poorness of the poet's thought? Or does it merely tell us that he was optimistic? No. I would say that on this very fact the greatness of Tennyson exists. The depth and the greatness of this poem is not perceived through the inquiry of philosophy but is only felt through our sympathy with the poet through his poetry—through his expression of himself as a man.

The first glance at the Prologue of the poem will reveal to us the tone of a strong faith that has passed through the struggle and finally conquered doubt, and we are impressed by the greatness of the poet's faith. However, on closer reading, we find that the poem has something more than its outward meaning. As Basil Willey says, poetry "operates through image, symbol, rhythm, suggestion and association, and therefore calls forth from us a far more complete response—complete in that the emotions, imagination and sensibility are involved as well as the intelligence."² Therefore it becomes our problem to [consider *how* the poet expresses himself as well as what he tells; and on inquiring into that *how*, we are also likely to touch the innermost depth of the poet's soul.

¹ Johnson, E. D. H., Introduction to *The Alien Vision of Victorian Poetry*, Princeton University Press, 1952, p. xiii.

² Willey, Basil, "Tennyson", *More Nineteenth Century Studies*, London, Chatto & Windus, 1956, p. 89. On this page he says that 'message' in poetry is important, but that we cannot value poetry merely for its message. "Meaning in poetry, as we know, is far more complex than the meaning in logical statement. It operates through image, etc."

The reading of this poem first presented to me the problem of science and religion, and next that of science and poetry in Tennyson. Both of them require close and concentrated thought, and I am afraid that I have not inquired deeply into either of them. But as I went on studying with the two problems in my mind, I gradually came to think that those two cannot be considered separately. The process of this study, therefore, is simply the process of my interest and thought excited in reading this poem. As the poet himself says, "poetry has many glancing colours".¹ Throughout my reading of this poem, I have been puzzled with "many glancing colours" that come out of a single line, but the only thought I have arrived at is that such different glancing colours are inseparable, starting from some deep place where their unity exists. Science, religion and poetry in Tennyson, it seems to me, are inseparable, though they are apparently diverse and conflicting. If Tennyson arrived at any reconciliation, the basis of the reconciling power, I believe, was in that unity. This study is only a trial to consider their relationships, with the aim of perceiving their reconciliation.

My consideration is chiefly upon Tennyson as a poet. I am sure that to study him as a poet will throw light upon the problem of his religious belief and his concept of Love, which, methinks, is firmly based upon humanity.

CHAPTER I CONFLICT AND HOPE

I. "Are God and Nature then at Strife?"

As I mentioned very briefly in the introduction, science was becoming a dominant element in human life throughout the nineteenth century. It was then that the scientific theories which became the foundation of modern science were established and also then that scientific knowledge began to be spread among the people in general. There were, for ex-

¹ Tennyson, Hallam, ed., *The Works of Tennyson*, with notes by the author, New York, Macmillan, 1939, p. xii.

"Poetry is like shot silk with many glancing colours. Every reader must find his own interpretation according to his ability, and according to his sympathy with the poet."

ample, the establishment of the atomic theory, the discovery of the cellular tissue, and the study of geological change, especially of evolutionism; and in the industrial field, steam power and electricity were becoming of great importance.¹ It will be interesting to quote here what Tennyson wrote about the village festival in *The Princess*:

. . . and here were telescopes
With azure views; and there a group of girls
In circle waited, whom the electric shock
Dislinked with shrieks and laughter: round the lake
A little clock work steamer paddling plied
And shook the lilies: perched about the knolls
A dozen angry models jetted steam:
A petty railway ran: a fire-balloon
Rose gem-like up before the dusky groves
And dropt a fairy parachute and past
And there thro' twenty posts of telegraph
They flashed a saucy message to and fro
Between the mimic stations: so that sport
Went hand in hand with Science.²

Though in childish sports, the layman's interest and wonder in new science is reflected here. Apart from such an innocent sense of wonder, however, there was a deep impact of science not only upon the social and industrial construction but also upon the people's concept of man and the universe. With a telescope in one hand and a microscope in the other, man stands isolated and puzzled upon the earth. He is now conscious that his body consists of cellular tissues, and he is also aware that the earth he lives in is only one of the thousands and thousands of other worlds. His thought goes back to the beginning of life and to the beginning of the world. The atoms, nebulae, planets, and the generation and the growth of the creatures—what is man and what shall he be? Reduced into infinitesimal time and space man can find no significance in his life.

The problem of science and human values, which affected Tennyson's basic attitude towards life, is the chief context of thought or philosophy

¹ Taylor, F. S., "Development of Science in the Nineteenth Century", Lindsay, J. ed., *The History of Science*, London, Cohen & West, 1951. The information above is chiefly taken from its translation by J. Sugai, published by Iwanami, 1956.

² *The Princess*, published in 1847, ll. 69-81.

in *In Memoriam*. The agony of the loss of a simple faith in God appears as early as in *The Supposed Confessions of a Second-rate Sensitive Mind not in Unity with Itself*, written in his early twenties.¹ In this poem he laments that he cannot simply believe in Christ's atonement or in the efficacy of prayer any more. He sees innocent children and simple women praying to God, but he himself cries :²

I fear
All may not doubt, but everywhere
Some must clasp Idols. Yet, my God,
Whom call I Idol? Let Thy dove
Shadow me over, and my sins
Be unremembered, and Thy love
Enlighten me. Oh, teach me yet
Somewhat before the heavy clod
Weighs on me, and the busy fret
Of that sharp-headed worm begins
In the gross blackness underneath.

Death is a complete decay, an ugly chaos. Then how can he believe, though he strives to, in the immortality and the spirituality of human life? As the title of the poem itself shows, the young mind has lost its unity and simplicity.

The death of his beloved friend Arthur Hallam in 1833, which motivated the writing of *In Memoriam*,³ intensified the poet's scepticism. Is the death of Arthur only a turn of a cog in the mechanical universe? Has their love and friendship vanished into smoke? The conflict between the material frailty of the human body and the spiritual eternity of love in which the poet yearns to believe is simply expressed in the paradoxical combination of the words, "the sacred dust,"⁴ by which the poet means the corpse of his friend. How much he wishes to believe that his dead friend has still a "sacred" existence, yet how persistent, at the same time, is the darkness of the thought that his friend is now nothing but "dust"! Can he still think that he is "sacred" even though he knows that he is

¹ Tennyson, Charles, *Alfred Tennyson*, London, Macmillan, 1950, pp. 89-90.

² *Ibid.*, p. 90.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 143 ff.

⁴ *In Memoriam*, XXI, vi.

“dust” ? The two voices speak within him alternately :

“ The cheeks drop in ; the body bows ;
Man dies ; nor is there hope in dust.”

Might I not say, “ Yet even here,
But for one hour, O Love, I strive
To keep so sweet a thing alive.”¹

But the geological change goes on continuously, quite indifferent to the poet's agony. The poet should hear

The moanings of the homeless sea,
The sound of streams that swift of slow
Draw down Aeonian hills, and sow
The dust of continents to be ;

And love would answer with a sigh,
“The sound of that forgetful shore
Will change my sweetness more and more,
Half-dead to know that I shall die.”²

Then the poet turns to a more general problem of nature and divine purpose. The influence of the evolutionary ideas appears in the passage often quoted as showing most clearly the poet's struggle with the question of God and Nature :

Are God and Nature then at strife
That Nature lends, such evil dreams?
So careful of the type she seems,
So careless of the single life ;

That I, considering everywhere
Her secret meaning in her deeds,
And finding that of fifty seeds
She often brings but one to bear,³

He falters now where he walked firmly and confidently before, when he had never felt any contradiction in nature. Nature, which the poet thinks should be the beautiful symbol of God's creative power, appears

¹ *I. M.*, XXXV, i-ii.

² *Ibid.*, XXXV, iii-iv.

³ *Ibid.*, LV, ii-iii.

now under the light of science to be of no divine significance. By natural selection the strongest and the fittest survive to maintain the type, but how about the numerous lives that are left to perish without bearing fruit? As he turns his eyes through the fossils to the past, a more threatening thought oppresses him :

“ So careful of the type ”? but no.
From scarped cliff and quarried stone
She cries, “ A thousand types are gone :
I care for nothing, all shall go.”¹

Nature is the field of an incessant struggle for existence ; indeed, it is “red in tooth and claw ” shrieking against the poet’s hope. All the systems of nature are mechanical ; nay, they are “obeying the law of blind fate.”² Under the dark cloud of sorrow the vision of nature is the vision of vanity :

“ The stars ”, she (the Sorrow) whispers, “ blindly run.
A web is woven across the sky ;
From out waste places comes a cry,
And murmurs from the dying sun :

“ And all the phantom, Nature, stands—
With all the music in her tone,
A hollow echo of my own,—
A hollow form with empty hands.”³

What the poet sees is only the blind coursing of the stars and nothing significant of any purpose. He *feels* something orderly and harmonious in nature ; he feels that he hears nature’s music somewhere ; however, the feeling is at once overcome by the doubt that the music he hears is only the reflection of his own mood. All the beauty, joy and life in nature is illusory ; nature is only a vacant form.

I have illustrated how science affected the poet’s view of nature. Science, especially the influence of astronomy, geology and evolutionism, led the poet in the wider scope of nature both in time and space. At the same time it showed him at once the smallness and valuelessness

¹ *I. M.* LVI, i.

² Percival, H. M., ed., “ Notes ” to *In Memoriam*, London, Macmillan, 1955, p. 123.

³ *I. M.*, III, iii.

of the individual life, and the poet suffered in the conflict between the material and the spiritual, mechanism and teleology. However, shall we simply admit that Tennyson was only fearful of the successive discoveries of the scientific truths from the natural world? Did he merely reject science and remain in a conflicting state?

One must notice that in Tennyson's poetry, thought in the midst of the conflict between science and religion, there is always a note of "faint trust"¹ in the reconciliation to come. There are always two voices speaking, one suggesting despair and death and the other hope for immortality; and behind the voice of immortality there is an invisible world sustaining it. It is from that world that the music of nature comes to his mind's ear. The Sorrow whispers, "The stars blindly run," but the poet says at the same time that the Sorrow whispers from "lying lips."² What is the real, the true voice, then? For Tennyson the discordant world that he sees is not what it really should be. The conflict he suffers is not *real*; it is in the world of the senses. Is there not another world beyond human perception? He yearns to penetrate through what *seems* into what *is*, the world of piercing clearness. When he cries, "O life as futile, then, as frail!"³ something makes him say at the same time,

What hope of answer, or redress?
Behind the veil, behind the veil.⁴

The cloud of sense and analyzing intellect hinders him from attaining the real world. The world "behind the veil" is what he wants to penetrate; and the "faint trust" that he someday can tear the veil is the basic tone throughout the process of the poet's soul, always sustaining him from complete destruction. He trusts in the world behind the veil because he feels

Sometimes a little corner shines,

¹ *I. M.*, LV, vii. ". . . call / To what I feel is Lord of all / And faintly trust the larger hope."

² *Ibid.*, III, i.

³ *Ibid.*, LVI, vii.

⁴ *Loc. cit.*

As over rainy mist inclines
A gleaming crag with belts of pines.¹

Sometimes another voice comes to him from the place he does not know. It is the third voice that reconciles the former two:

I found an angel of the night;
The voice was low, the look was bright;
...
The voice was not the voice of grief,
The words were hard to understand.²

Where is the source of that voice? It comes from the world that can neither be explained by human words nor be felt by the physical senses. But since that world always remained somewhere in Tennyson's mind and since it was the only consolation in his struggle to catch a moment's glimpse of that world behind the veil, it is a significant task for us to approach it. Then what way shall we take?

2. "I Am Merlin, Who Follow The Gleam"—The Poetic Belief—

Great the Master,
And sweet the magic,
When over the valley,
In early summers,
Over the mountain,
On human faces,
And all around me,
Moving to melody,
Floated The Gleam.

"Merlin and The Gleam" is Tennyson's autobiographical poem. Learning magic from his Master, Merlin followed "The Gleam" throughout his life, although sometimes its light retreated. "The Gleam" in this poem, Tennyson himself says, signifies "the higher poetic imagination." According to his *Memoir*, his feeling of the magic

¹ *The Two Voices*, ll. 187-9.

Cf. the summits [of truth] slope
Beyond the furthest flights of hope
Wrapt in dense cloud from base to cope. (ll. 184-6)

² *I. M.*, LXIX, iv-v.

of Merlin—that spirit of poetry—was what made the poet “follow throughout his work a pure and high ideal, with a simple and single devotedness and a desire to ennoble the life of the world, and which helped him through doubts and difficulties to ‘endure as seeing Him who is invisible.’”¹ With this thought in my mind, I want to explore a step more into the poet’s relation to nature and his mystical experiences.

As regards the various phenomena of the natural world, the poet, though threatened by the materialistic facts of natural science, wished to take delight in what science disclosed before him, for nature was to him a treasury of mystery; and, what is more important, science seemed more to deepen the sense of mystery in the universe than to deprive him of his poetic dream. It may seem to be contradictory to say so. For Tennyson, however, science, or a certain aspect of it, was very congenial to his religious and poetic mood. Basil Willey writes in his *More Nineteenth Century Studies* that for Tennyson

the whole spectacle of Nature was somehow irrelevant to faith. Even in the early days, at one of the Apostels’ debates at Cambridge, he had voted ‘No’ on the question ‘Is an intelligible First Cause deducible from the Phenomena of the Universe?’ And later, he is reported to have said, ‘Strange that these wonders should draw some men to God and repel others. No more reason in one than in the other.’ This attitude distinguishes Tennyson . . . not only from Wordsworth but from that line of thinkers who, from the seventeenth century onwards, had been demonstrating the wisdom of God from the Creation.²

Such indeed was Tennyson’s philosophical attitude towards nature, which made him question, “Are God and Nature then at strife?” However, Willey adds one more sentence which is very significant:

I suspect that it [i.e., such an attitude of Tennyson towards nature as mentioned above] was also at variance with his own subconscious feeling.³

Though philosophy denied being able to deduce God from the natural phenomena, the “subconscious feeling” was different; he subconsci-

¹ Tennyson, H. L., “Preface” to *A. L. Tennyson, a Memoir*, London, Macmillan, 1898, vol. I, p. xii.

² Willey, Basil, “Tennyson”, *More Nineteenth Century Studies*, London, Chatto & Windus, 1956, pp. 85–86.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 86.

ously felt that God and Nature could be reconciled somewhere. In *The Two Voices*, when the outer voice spoke,

Thou art so full of misery,
Were it not better not to be?

the inner voice answered,

Let me not cast in endless shade
What is so wonderfully made.¹

Wonderfully made, indeed! If the poet did not take delight in nature's elaborate work, how could he describe the dragon-fly as below?

Today I saw the dragon-fly
Come from the wells where he did lie.

An inner impulse rent the veil
Of his old husk: from head to tail
Came out clear plates of sapphire mail.

He dried his wings: like gauze they grew;
Thro' crofts and pastures wet with dew
A living flash of light he flew.²

The poet is only describing the dragon-fly and its metamorphose as he saw it, but all the feelings of mystery and awe in nature are unconsciously revealed through the description. With what a pure, penetrating eye he finds the beauty of the creation! The dragon-fly is only a frail being; but it suggested to the poet "a living flash of light," a moment's symbol of eternity.

It is considered that, while his thought suffered in the conflict between God and Nature, his hope for, or belief in, the reconciliation was elsewhere. He had, methinks, behind the consciousness of philosophy, a mystical belief in nature which was the motive of his unsettled aspiration. It is very true that he could not deduce God from the natural phenomena, that he could not find Him "in world or sun, or eagle's wing, or insect's eye."³ Referring back to Willey's words that Tenny-

¹ *The Two Voices*, ll. 2-3, 5-6.

² *Ibid.*, ll. 8-15.

³ *I. M.*, CXXIV, ii.

"I found Him not in world or sun," etc.

son's materialistic view of nature was "at variance with his own subconscious feeling", we cannot simply assume that what the poet subconsciously felt was at once what he ultimately arrived at. The ultimate salvation was in his encountering the God of Personality and of Love; and, in that sense, the poet could not find Him directly in the natural world. The religious feeling that he had in nature was not yet the belief of a Christian but was a more primitive, mystical feeling as a poet. Willey writes in the same work that I have mentioned about Tennyson's faithful description of nature:

. . . each time he had fixed to perfection some aspect of sky, cloud, sea or flower, he had brought men a step nearer to the soul of all things. For there was . . . a religious, or at least pantheistic, assumption beneath all this: Nature was God's handiwork, his vesture, or his symbolic language; to study it, then, was not an aesthetic indulgence but a solemn duty, a discipline and vocation. The poet's satisfaction in his own successes, therefore, was like that of the natural scientist. It was more than the craftsman's joy in his own skill; it was a sense, also, that he had transmitted to his fellow-men a fragment of God's truth. This feeling persisted in Tennyson long after he had ceased to find in Nature the clearest evidence of God's power and love.¹

This, I think, was the feeling that underlay the mind of Tennyson as a poet. This was the feeling, too, though the poet himself was unaware, that always stimulated him to go forward in his poetic career. He was not conscious that he was searching after God through his work; indeed, he was not directly seeking for the God conceived in the orthodox religion. However, the poetic experience was religious—religious in a more primitive sense than 'Christian' implies. The object of his belief was not settled, and he always hoped for something higher. This is what is shown rather through his 'poetry' itself than through his 'thought'; and when we inquire into his poetic attitude toward nature, we can say, as Willey suggests, that he was like a natural scientist.

I mentioned in the preceding paragraphs Tennyson's mystical feeling as a poet. Then a question may arise: What is the relation of his mystical belief and his Christian belief? Indeed, his suffering, as we have seen, was in the loss of the evidence of God's love in creation. After he had

¹ Willey, *op. cit.*, pp. 78-9.

regained faith, he called with confidence to "The strong Son of God, Immortal Love"¹ who only could harmonize all the conflicting tones of the sensible world. But how did he find Him? Did he find Him through philosophy or theology? Neither. For him the only solution lay in the world far, far away, the world behind the veil. It was by taking off all the philosophy and theology, dogmas and forms of religion that he experienced the revelation of that world.² As Charles Tennyson writes in the biography of his father, the divine existence was not proved by human reason but was only proved by "faith, for which he [was] thrown back on the primitive feelings and instincts, and to which he [had to] cling regardless of religious forms."³ T. S. Eliot writes on this point that, though the poet states his firm Christian belief in his consciousness, he [Eliot] gets quite a different impression, saying:

He [Tennyson] was desperately anxious to hold the faith of the believer, without being clear about what he wanted to believe; he was capable of illumination which he was incapable of understanding.⁴

Indeed, Tennyson himself did not know what he was seeking for. In Section LV he says:

I stretch lame hands of faith, and grope,
And gather dust and chaff, and call
To what I feel is Lord of all,
And faintly trust the larger hope. (v)

Tennyson's belief was undogmatic, and therefore it was primitive but essential in its experience. The importance was more in the experience itself than in the ideas attached to it.

In the world behind the veil, there was a vague object of Tennyson's belief. It was, I think, not directly the existence of the Christian God; but it was something more akin to the object of his poetic belief, or

¹ *I. M.*, "Prologue", i.

² His experience of being in a trance is seen in Section XCV.

³ Tennyson, C., *op. cit.*, p. 484. Cf. Tennyson, H., *op. cit.*, p. 309. "He thought, with Arthur Hallam, that 'the essential feelings of religion subsist in the utmost diversity of forms, that different language does not always imply different opinions, nor different opinions any difference in real faith.'"

⁴ Hayward, J., ed., Eliot, T. S., *Selected Prose*, Penguin Books, Middlesex, 1953, p. 181.

rather, the object of his poetic belief shows an aspect of it. It was something he felt beyond the appearance of nature, at times revealed through the "floating gleam, moving to melody," to follow which was the comfort in his difficulties. Moreover, in correspondence with the object beyond nature's appearance, it existed in the depth of his own soul. As Charles Tennyson writes, his father thought that though the proof of God was impossible, "man [had], in the mystical hints of childhood,

A breath, a whisper—some divine farewell—
Desolate sweetness, far and far away :

dim intimation of a life before and beyond this life."¹ A correspondent passage is found in Section XLIV of *In Memoriam*, where also the poet writes about the mystic flash from beyond the consciousness. In this world man grows more and more,

But he forgets the days before
God shut the doorways of his head.
The days have vanished, tone and tint,
And yet perhaps the hoarding sense
Gives out at times (he knows not whence)
A little flash, a mystic hint. (i-ii)

The mystic flash comes to him from the days before his conscious self was born. The state before the identification is the state of a baby :

The baby new to earth and sky,
What time his tender palm is prest
Against the circle of the breast
Has never thought that "this is I."²

Man grows and the deep unconscious self is covered with knowledge and experiences. However, it remains in the depth of the soul and gives sometimes a "mystic hint." Is it not the same hint as was given sometimes from the crevice of the cloud (as I mentioned in the first section of this chapter)? And does it not derive from what man has "the

¹ Tennyson, C., *op. cit.*, p. 485.

² *I. M.*, XLV, i.

likest God within the soul”¹ What is the world of a child beyond the conscious self? It is the world of primitive unity, and it is what Tennyson thought to be “the likest God within the soul.” It was from there that the reconciling voice came.² There human nature is a living whole, in direct and mystical communion with the surrounding natural world. There exists no scientist, no philosopher, or no theologian—no diversity in the conscious world,—but there is human nature as a whole, which scarcely suffers the changes of the external world. This is the starting place, as well as the uniting place, of all the divisions of the sensible world, and it was solace for Tennyson to return there as a simple human being.³

I sometimes hold it half a sin
To put in words the grief I feel
For words, like Nature, half reveal
And half conceal the Soul within.

But, for the unquiet heart and brain,
A use in measured language lies;
The sad mechanic exercise,
Like dull narcotics, numbing pain.⁴

Nature has her Soul within. It is what we saw as the object of his poetic belief. At the same time, the poet says that words have also their soul within. What does this Soul mean? If Nature’s Soul is the world behind the appearance, is not the Soul of the words the world beyond the consciousness? They are two aspects of the one world

¹ *I. M.*, LV, i.

² See the last part of the preceding section.

³ Cf. Lewis, C. D., *The Poet’s Way of Knowledge*, the Henry Sidgwick Memorial Lecture, 1956, Cambridge University Press, 1957, p. 32. The author quotes Richard Carrington’s words, “Science, art and religion, evolving to new insight from their starting place in the mind of primitive man, are inseparable processes. They are all techniques of knowledge, operating with equal validity at different levels of awareness.” Cf. Tennyson, H., *op. cit.*, p. 298. Hallam writes about the criticism on *I. M.* by men like Maurice and Robertson that the poet stood against his doubts “on behalf of those first principles which underlie all creeds, which belong to our earliest childhood, and on which the wisest and the best have rested through all ages.”

⁴ *I. M.*, V, i-ii.

behind the veil. As Nature gives only a partial glimpse of her Soul,¹ so do words give only a moment's glimpse of humaity. The poet humbly admits this fact; but, though it is only a partial glimpse, it *is* a glimpse of human nature as a whole. It is the reason why "for the unquiet heart and brain, a use in measured language lies." Here Tennyson says that through poetry he can catch a glimpse of the world behind the veil within himself. This is the comfort given by "The Gleam of Merlin."

CHAPTER II APPROACH TO RECONCILIATION

Poetry starts from the unconscious unity of human nature. The images and melodies that are dropped from the poet's mouth tell more of himself than he is aware, and we find there that seemingly diverse elements are sometimes unified. In Tennyson, we are interested to see that while science and religion are in conflict in his thought, he uses scientific images in his poetry. In this chapter I am going to study how he weaves science into his poetry, considering also his attitude towards nature that I referred to in the beginning of the last section. I am not intending to arrive directly at any reasonable solution of the problem of science and religion raised in this poem. However, it seems to me one of the ways of exploring into the world behind the veil is to study how and where science and poetry approach their meeting place.

1. "Every Dew-drop Paints a Bow"—Poetry and Science—

As a general concept, science and poetry are irreconcilable, just as science and religion are. Their procedures are quite different: the scientist "goes forward by analysis, by measurement, by a severely conditioned intellectual processes, separating the unlike," while the poet's work is "achieved through synthesis, by abolishing measurement, by uniting the unlikes, by not too soon channelling the intellectual pro-

¹ Cf. Lewis, C. D., *The Poetic Image*, London, Jonathan Cape, 1955, p. 29.

"in the least element of beauty we have a partial intuition of the whole world."

cesses.”¹ It is very true; poetry is murdered by dissecting.² The process of work taken by the scientist cannot be described in poetry; if poetry tries to do so it loses its poetic value at the very moment. As Wordsworth says in his Preface to *The Lyrical Ballads*, the poet should give pleasure to human beings “not as a lawyer, a physician, a mariner, an astronomer, or a natural philosopher but as a Man.” A poet should express himself as a Man, as a whole, not affected by the specialized working of the intellect.

However, Wordsworth anticipated elsewhere in the same Preface that the discoveries of the scientists would be the objects of the poet’s art if scientific knowledge became common knowledge and was diffused in the general consciousness of the age.³ In Tennyson’s lifetime, as I mentioned briefly in the beginning of the preceding chapter, there was the great progress and the popularization of science; and that historical circumstance, mixed with Tennyson’s own interest in it, made the poet’s own aesthetic ground for imagination. However, as science and poetry, at least apparently, are heterogeneous, it is a difficult task for a poet to use scientific images in poetry. In what way was it possible for Tennyson? I will give some examples and study how the poet weaves scientific knowledge or attitudes into his poetry, “for the purpose of expression, communication, and finally, creation.”⁴

Law is God, say some: no God at all, says the fool;
For all we have power to see is a straight staff bent in a pool.⁵

¹ Kano, H., ed., Bonamy Dobrée, *The Broken Cistern—Poetry and Science—*, Tokyo, Kaibunsha, 1957, p. 14.

² Wordsworth, “The Tables Turned”, l. 28.

“Our Meddling Intellect / Misshapes the beautiful forms of things, / We murder to dissect.

³ This information is taken from Lewis’ *The Poet’s Way of Knowledge*, p. 26.

⁴ Kano, H., ed., B. Dobrée, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

Dobrée considers “various stages in the process of scientism being absorbed in poetry.” They vary from the mere versification of scientific statement to the complete digestion of science in poetry so that it may work as symbols or imagery “for the purpose of expression, etc.”

⁵ “The higher Pantheism,” ll. 15–16.

In saying that the sensible world is not the real world Tennyson uses the phrase "a straight staff bent in a pool." Any careful observer notices that if he puts a straight stick in water and looks at it from outside, the stick seems to be bent. Tennyson was quick and sensitive in finding such little scientific facts and putting them into his poetry. The following examples are taken from *In Memoriam*: in section XXIV, the poet, recalling the past days of the friendship with Arthur Hallam, reflects that it may be because of the present grief that the past seems to him so happy :

is it that the haze of grief
Makes former gladness loom so great?

for "a haze magnifies the objects seen through it."¹ Or is it because the past days are distant that they seem to be so perfect?

Or that the past will always win
A glory from its being far ;
And orb into a perfect star
We saw not, when we moved therein? (iv)

The near view shows the rugged surface of a star, but from the distance it is seen bright and perfectly round. In Section XCII the poet reflects that even if a vision of his lost friend were to come to him, he would think it to be only the product of his own fancy ; it might be a phantom

And such refraction of events
As often rises ere they rise. (iv)

For these two lines the poet's own explanation says, "The heavenly bodies are seen above the horizon, by reflection, before they actually arise,"² which is a phenomenon like mirage caused by the refraction of light due to the different density of the air.

As we have seen, we find the reflection of scientific knowledge here and there in Tennyson's poetry. It is often used as a metaphor or a simile for the better or fuller expression of the poet's ideas. By the development of astronomy and of optics since the achievement of New-

¹ Percival, H. M., Notes to *I. M.*, London, Macmillan, 1955, p. 130.

² Saito, T., ed., "Notes" to *I. M.*, p. 202.

ton, such scientific facts in his poetry may have been of common interest or of common knowledge of the Victorians; and therefore one can imagine that such similes and metaphors added to the communicative power of the poetry. However, here we have to ask a question: Are they some of the finest verses of Tennyson's poetry? The poet weaves these pieces of knowledge very naturally and skilfully into his verses, but his aim seems to be more upon the intellectual conviction of his ideas than upon the images themselves. Science here is *used* for communication; the poet's attitude to it is objective and intellectual; and so far as it is so, science cannot truly live in poetry. How, then, is science digested in Tennyson's poetry?

Break, thou deep vase of chilling tears
That grief hath shaken into frost!¹

Tennyson, benumbed by the grief of the loss of his friend, thinks of suicide. He calls to his own heart "Break!" for even tears are frozen and have stopped the full flowing of the feeling of sorrow. The picture of ice filling the vase and breaking it is a pathetic metaphor for the poet's agony; but even here, when we look at the poet's own note saying, "Water can be brought below freezing point and not turn into ice—if it be kept still; but if it be moved suddenly it turns into ice and may break the vase,"² we know from where this image has come. Here, too, it is science that helps the poet with his expression. However, do we feel anything like scientific reasoning here? The reason hides itself behind the impressiveness of the picture. The poet can give the physical explanation for it, but what is seen here is rather a sensuous than an intellectual reaction of the poet to the phenomenon. Here is another similar example: in Section XIX, giving his own thought on poetry, he writes:

The Wye is hushed nor moved along,
And hushed my deepest grief of all,
When filled with tears that cannot fall,
I brim with sorrow drowning song. (iii)

¹ *I. M.*, IV, iii.

² Saito, T., ed., *op. cit.*, p. 154.

The picture here is a cup brimming full of water, which is at the point of falling but does not fall—a spectacle that certainly attracts the attention of an imaginative scientist.

Tennyson's word pictures are often enriched by scientific knowledge, but it is rather by his original sensitiveness of the picture of the phenomenon than by the intellectual interest in it. That fresh sensibility for the delicate appearance of the natural phenomena, I think, is far more intimately woven in poetry than the logical arguments are. In such a case the poet is less conscious of the logic that the fact contains, but he is more keenly aware of the delicate beauty of the spectacle. In the section about Hallam's return to the country from the noises of the town he writes :

O joy to him in this retreat,
Immantled in ambrosial dark,
To drink the cooler air, and mark
The landscape winking thro' the heat:¹

The poet and the friend are sitting under the cool shade of the trees, while they look at the heat-haze on the ground at a distance. It is suggested by the phrase "thro' the heat" that the poet knows how that phenomenon occurs, but the word "heat" here has a different effect; it emphasizes in contrast the cool air among the shade that they are enjoying. In Section CV there is a beautiful contrast of the stillness of the Christmas celebration indoors and the only motion of the rising stars beyond the wood :

No dance, no motion, save alone
What lightens in the lucid east
Of rising worlds in yonder wood. (vi-vii)

What a great effect the motion of the stars has in contrast with the stillness that reigns over the whole circumstance! But again there is a note by the poet himself explaining the motion as "the scintillating motion of the stars that rise," a phenomenon explained by the air density and the refraction of light as in the case of heat-haze and mirage.

¹ I. M., LXXXIX, iv.

But here also the importance is not in the knowledge. It is effective because the poet looks at the phenomenon with his own fresh attitude. Knowledge may have suggested such an image to him, but knowledge alone cannot produce the effective picture in poetry; imagination must include knowledge before knowledge can produce imagery.¹

When a poet tries to impart the facts of empirical knowledge through verses (as in the cases of the passage from *The Princess* that I quoted early in this study) he must fully be aware that he is writing *about* science. Even when they are used as symbols for what the poet has in his heart, they cannot produce the real poetic value so far as the poet intentionally uses them. In order that science may completely be digested into the poetic organs, it has to take off its clothes of 'science' so that the reader may hardly be aware of its being science—its being founded on the logical basis—but he may feel it as producing a certain atmosphere in the poet's work. It may be of question whether or not we should call such a thing science; but if we think only about the mechanical or logical phases of science, we can see no approach of science to poetry; we must go back to the more original phase of science.

In Section LXV the poet writes about the consoling thought that "love is too precious to be lost" and in that comfort he sings

Till out of painful phases wrought
There flutters up a happy thought
Self-balanced on a lightsome wing. (ii)

In the last two lines there is a beautiful image of a butterfly having just come out of its chrysalis. No one can write such lines as these who never has observed with care and wonder the fresh, delicate and tender wings of a young butterfly just beginning to spread and unsteadily balancing the body on the husk. As is seen in the preceding chapter from his description of a dragon-fly, Tennyson takes delight in such a spectacle like a field naturalist; and his feeling of the wonders of creation

¹ I used the word "sense" in contrast with "intellect", but the word "imagination" implies more than "sense" does. It is the source of poetry that includes both sense and intellect. Cf. Note on p. 40.

appears as minute and precise description of nature. In describing the colour of a maiden's hair he writes :

hair
In gross and hue the chestnut, when the shell
Divides three-fold to show the fruit within.¹

Is precision a destructive element in poetry? It is so if the poet *tries* to be precise only for precision's sake. In this case, however, did Tennyson aim merely at physical precision in describing the shell dividing "three-fold"? My answer is negative. His precision, it seems to me, was accompanied with the feeling of beauty of the object. From his early boyhood Tennyson is reported to have had the sensibility of accuracy. After telling about the excitement that the boy Tennyson felt when he saw Bewick's woodcuts in a book, Charles Tennyson adds that his delight in Bewick's engravings was due not only to their beauty but also to their accuracy, and he points out his father's "scientific quality in the approach to nature" through his description of animals' eyes found in his notebook.² It is not that he was more sensible of accuracy than of beauty but that, I think, he was sensible of beauty through the accuracy and delicacy of the forms of things.

Cecil Day Lewis says in *The Poetic Image* about the poet's precision, quoting Tennyson's lines on the sunflower :

No one would claim that even so physically accurate a description as Tennyson gave when he saw

Unloved, the sunflower, shining fair,
Ray round with flames her disk of seed,

is precise from the botanist's point of view, any more than a botanist's description would be accurate from the poet's. The poet's re-creation includes both the objects and the sensations connecting him with the object, both the fact and the tone of an experience; it is when object and sensation, happily married by him, breed an image in which both their likenesses appear, that something 'comes to us with an effect of revelation'³.

¹ "The Brook", ll. 72-3.

² Tennyson, C., *op. cit.*, p. 36.

"The eyes of the sheep . . . is rather watery and insipid; the pupil has no distinction, but seems blended rather unpleasingly with the white, so as to give an idea of floating humors, etc."

³ Lewis, C. D., *op. cit.*, p. 23.

Generally speaking, precision pertains to the object; however, in order that precision may “breed an image” or may have an “effect of revelation,” it must be married to the subject’s experience. What kind of experience is it, then, for Tennyson? If the precision has an “effect of revelation” upon the reader’s heart, the precision is the poet’s *discovery*—something revealed to the poet himself. The discovery is not merely the product of trial; it comes to the mind without command. The poet is different from the scientist in that he makes others discover the same thing, or experience the same feeling of revelation through the poem. If we feel something more than the scientific statement in Tennyson’s precision,¹ it is because his experience, his joy in the discovery of the beauty, is married to it. The subject and the object go together in poetry, while the subject has hidden itself in scientific statement. Here is the difference between scientific and poetic precision.² But in the experience of discovery and in the joy in it, there is hardly a distinction between the two. Read the following quotation from B. Dobrée, though he speaks from a more general viewpoint on the relation of science and poetry :

It certainly is a false dichotomy to say, . . . that the scientist pursue truth and the artist, beauty. Both pursue truth, searching for actuality and relationship, and both arrive at beauty. (And . . . is the satisfaction the scientist feels in achieving a perfect statement of truth, so far as he has discovered it, in essence different from the pleasure which fulfills the artist when he presents the truth so far as it has come to him at that moment?)³

The poet must return to his own experience. Dobrée continues :

. . . why . . . poetry directly about science is nearly always of the second order at best, is because the poet has accepted the scientist’s exploration of truth instead

¹ On reading the lines of the sunflower, we get a vivid picture of the blooming sunflower which cannot be produced by a mere physical description.

² Lewis, *The Poetic Image*, pp. 24–5. Day Lewis says that the poet must “see things as they really are,” but that he must avoid “dead accuracy.” For, he says, “nothing *really is* in isolation, pure and self sufficient; reality involves relationship, and as soon as you have relationship you have, for human beings, emotion; so that the poet cannot see things as they really are, cannot be precise about them, unless he is also precise about the feelings which attach him to them.”

³ Dobrée, B., *op. cit.*, p. 18.

of furthering his own. He has subdued himself to the material the scientist works in, instead of adventuring into his own reality.¹

I am not discussing here the problem of science and poetry in general; but let me quote a passage of Einstein which shows that for a scientist, too, there is a world behind the veil and that he can attain it only by intuition :

There is no logical way to the discovery of these elementary laws. There is only the way of intuition, which is helped by the feeling for the order lying behind the appearance.²

In the experience of revelation itself, there may exist a primitive germ of science in the poet's imagination. Torahiko Terada, in his essay titled "Lucretius and Science," writes that the Roman poet Lucretius (98-54 B.C.) was given a suggestion of the concept of atoms by looking at the motion of dust floating in the sunbeam. Though we cannot call such a concept to be 'science', he says, we see there a great possibility of developing into science.³ In Tennyson's imagery, too, there appears at times, in Lewis' words, a "tone of an experience" which is congenial to the natural scientist's. The reason why, for Tennyson, science was neither the murder by dissecting nor the botanizing upon the mother's grave was that, when he returned to his own experience as a poet, he could sympathize with the natural scientist as a man. Upon this basis, I think, the gift of the nineteenth century was truly alive, and in Huxley's words, he became "the first poet since Lucretius who has understood the drift of science."⁴

Moreover, behind all this, I think, there was in Tennyson a feeling of mystical love and awe in nature.⁵ We are reminded of what we consider-

¹ Dobrée, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

² Beveridge, W. I. B., *The Art of Scientific Investigation*, New York, W. W. Norton, 1950, p. 53.

³ Terada, T., "Lucretius and Science", B. Tamamushi, ed., *Science for Students*, Tokyo, Kawade,, 1957, p. 94.

⁴ Walker, Hugh, *The Literature of the Victorian Era*, Cambridge University Press, 1921, p. 302.

⁵ Tennyson, H., *op. cit.*, p. 316. Hallam writes that the poet "often quoted Newton's saying that we are like children picking up pebbles on the shore of the Infinite Ocean."

ed in the second section of the preceding chapter and Willey's words on Tennyson's discription of nature :

. . . there was . . . a religious, or at least a pantheistic, assumption beneath all this : Nature was God's handiwork, his vesture, or his symbolic language ; to study it, then, was not an aesthetic indulgence but a solemn duty, a discipline and vocation. The poet's satisfaction in his successes, therefore, was like that of the natural scientist.¹

Nature has her "Soul" behind, and it was at times revealed to him through the tender and delicate appearances of the creation. It was the duty of his poetry to transmit to others what was revealed to him.

I have thus far illustrated, so far as I could perceive, the scientific quality in Tennyson's imagery. However, it is only an intellectual trial to divide 'something scientific' from his poetry, for in his imagination, Tennyson is not scientific. Though he found the meeting place of science and poetry in the world behind the veil, in poetry itself science exists no more ; when it is truly alive, it has lost its distinction and has merged into something greater—it is enclosed in poetry as the expression of human nature. We can but feel it in the sympathy with the poet as a man, in his lovely atmosphere where "every dew-drop paints a bow."²

2. "The Glory of the Sum of Things"

Wild bird, whose warble, liquid sweet,
Rings Eden thro' the budded quicks,
O tell me where the senses mix,
O tell me where the passions meet,

Whence radiate : fierce extremes employ
Thy spirits in the darkening leaf,
And in the midmost heart of grief
Thy passion clasps a secret joy :

¹ Willey, B., *op. cit.*, p. 53.

² *I. M.*, CXII, v.

And all the breeze of fance brows / And every dew-drop paints a bow . . .

"Every dew-drop turns into a miniature rainbow." (Tennyson) Saito, T., ed., Notes to *I. M.*, p. 217.

And I —my harp would prelude woe—
I cannot all command the strings;
The glory of the sum of things
Will flash along the chords and go.¹

Although the poet intends to sing the song of sorrow, his song comes out to be a different thing from what he expects. His will cannot command his own song; the song is commanded by something greater. All the senses mix their colours in the unknown depth and radiate from there with the brilliancy of sunlight. Why is the song so mysterious? How does it reconcile the “fierce extremes”? As the poet himself wonders, poetry has a mysterious reconciling power. He says;

in the song I love to sing
A doubtful gleam of solace lives.²

Poetry does not give any reasonable solution to the doubt:

Her care is not to part and prove;

but

She takes, when harsher moods remit
What slender shade of doubt may flit
And makes it vassal unto love.³

There is, though imperfectly, the poetic solution for Tennyson. Why? The answer has already been suggested. Though he says,

words, like Nature, half reveal
And half conceal the Soul within,⁴

His words *are* rooted in his soul, in the world behind the veil, in the world of unity. There the reason and the sense, the subject and the object, mixed into one thing—Imagination.⁵ Science, when it has lost

¹ *I. M.*, LXXXVIII, i-iii.

² *Ibid.*, XXXVIII, ii.

³ *Ibid.*, XLVIII, ii.

⁴ *Ibid.*, V, i.

⁵ This is the source of poetry. Cf. Miki, Kiyoshi, “Study of Humanity Through Literature” *Works*, Tokyo, Iwanami, 1950, vol. X, 390-1. Here he considers the meaning of “imagination”, saying that imagination is the creative power based on both sense and understanding. Cf. According to W. H. Auden’s interpretation, the Primary Imagination means the encountering with divinity. (from Mr. Kano’s lecture on poetry at Tokyo Woman’s Christian College, 1956.)

its distinction in its highest and deepest stage, lives in poetry; and so does the poet himself in the greater Soul when he has lost his small self!

However, Tennyson says that poetry is not enough for him and neither is the mystery in nature. He says that poetry is only crispering ripples on the beach that never can reach the inmost depth. In spite of this saying, however, it is through the surface that he can catch a glimpse of the depth. If it is in religion that the poet is "*convinced* of the ultimate significance of the human scene," it is in poetry that he has a "sense of its significance, its momentousness."¹ In Tennyson they are both rooted in the same depth—the depth of humanity, the depth of the "Sum of Things." It is upon this depth that Tennyson bases his conception of *Love*, which unites all, harmonizes all, and embraces all; and it is from this depth that he cries out that the highest human is divine.

I mentioned that Tennyson felt "Soul" also in nature. I interpreted it as the object of his poetic belief and mystical love, which is like the god of pantheism. However, when Tennyson is *convinced* of the existence of Love within the highest and the deepest humanity, his pantheism becomes higher—the god of mystery assumes the clear light of God of Love. It is then that the vague object of the world behind the veil becomes clear. We may call it love, or humanity. It is One thing and it is Everything. I think Tennyson as a poet is not essentially different from Tennyson as a religious believer; in the depth and the height of Tennyson as a poet there is Tennyson as a religious believer. This is because 'poet' means human being, and his Love is based upon humanity. Through his poetry, then, we can approach what he finally attained.

CONCLUSION

I have thus far considered the crisscrossing problems of science, religion and poetry in Tennyson. Behind all of them there is the world of unity, which cannot be comprehended by our conscious selves. To

¹ Lewis, C. D., *The Poet's Way of Knowledge*, p. 30.

comprehend it is to penetrate into *reality*, which is possible only through revelation. The solution of the doubts and difficulties for Tennyson lay in that world of unity, a temporal glimpse of which he caught through his poetry.

The influence of the age was very great upon Tennyson. His scepticism was due to that historical circumstance. But the place to where he finally returned was the unchangeable depth of simple humanity. His soul only seemed to take

The touch of change in calm or storm
But (knew) no more of transient form
In her deep self, than some dead lake

That holds the shadow of a lark
Hung in the shadow of a heaven.¹

As T. S. Eliot says, “the surface of Tennyson stirred about with his time, and he had nothing to hold fast except his unique and unerring feeling for the sounds of words.”² Some may not be satisfied with such a saying; some may still be doubtful of the value of the “unique and unerring feeling for the sounds of words.” The solution of the difficult philosophical problem, however, was in the seemingly simplest thing. Eliot continues: “Tennyson’s surface, his technical accomplishment, is intimate with his depths. . . . By looking innocently at the surface we are most likely to come to the depths, to the abyss of sorrow.”³ The depth is not the depth of knowledge or philosophy but is the depth of humanity.

Everywhere in the sensible world and in every distinction in our consciousness, the truth behind is one—through the loss of self we can live in the Higher Self. Aiming to attain that Higher Self, all the diverse things of the visible world mutually help, making a harmonious relationship within themselves. Nothing is in isolation; everything is a son

¹ *I. M.*, XVI, ii–iii.

Here the poet means ‘sorrow’ by the word ‘she’, but we can interpret it as meaning his own soul.

² Eliot, T. S., *op. cit.*, p. 183.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 184.

of the same great Father. This is the teaching that I get from *In Memoriam*.¹

Tennyson was a simple man. But how difficult it is to become truly simple! Tennyson, I think, was one of those great men who at last attained simplicity through many difficulties. I am filled with a quiet joy to think that I could have, though imperfectly, a personal contact with the poet through his work, whom I want to call a Man of Great Simplicity.

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¹ To this statement his later religious or philosophical poems may present a fuller background.

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